

The Value and Importance of International Education: Focus on India

The [Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs \(ECA\)](#) of the [U.S. Department of State](#) administers a number of exchange and training programs that help promote knowledge about the United States and mutual international understanding. As part of its activities, ECA maintains connections with its exchange participants, or "alumni," after they complete their programs. As part of a broad range of incentives that help keep alumni in touch with ECA, the Bureau administers the State Alumni website (<https://alumni.state.gov>), an online community by and for alumni of U.S. Government exchange programs.

The views expressed by Mr. Farrell are representative of U.S. Government Policy. All other guest and participant views within the transcript do not necessarily reflect U.S. Government policy.



Thomas Farrell

Live Discussion: The Value and Importance of International Education: Focus on India

Thomas A. Farrell, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Academic Programs and a former Fulbrighter, joined us live on Friday, March 9, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. EST (15:00 to 16:00 GMT), for a discussion on the value and importance of international education. Mr. Farrell was particularly interested in hearing opinions from Indian alumni about their academic experiences in the United States, as he and Under Secretary of State Karen Hughes will be leading a delegation of U.S. university presidents to India to meet with government, student, and business leaders at the end of March.

[Read Mr. Farrell's bio](#)

Moderator:

For the majority of our "Q & A Live" web chats, alumni pose questions to guest speakers who then answer these questions live online. For this "Live Discussion" web chat, Mr. Farrell welcomes the opportunity to do the same and answer your questions about international education. **However, he is equally interested in hearing your comments and opinions on your U.S. educational experience. To help facilitate this discussion, we invite you to consider the following questions when participating in the "Live Discussion."** Please feel free to comment upon the remarks of your fellow alumni as well!

Questions:

1. What was attractive for you about studying in the United States?
2. What has the education you received in the U.S. meant in your life/career?
3. What are some perceived impediments to studying in the U.S.?
4. How do we continue to attract talented, educated people to study in the United States?
5. How can we better market India as a knowledge destination for American students wanting to study abroad?

Moderator:

Welcome to a live discussion on the value and importance of international education. Thank you to our alumni in India who have taken a moment to take part in this event. Mr. Farrell is online and reviewing your questions and comments. We will begin momentarily.

Thomas Farrell:

Hi! It's wonderful to be here with my colleagues from the Alumni Office in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and to be with you who are joining us online. This is an exciting moment for me as we prepare for a unique visit to India with Under Secretary Karen Hughes and representatives of U.S. higher education institutions. This delegation represents the first federal government higher education partnership to South Asia. I look forward to answering your questions.

Dr Mahantappa From India:

To attract poor, talented students from India to the U.S, the government must announce some scholarships. I know after arriving in the U.S, students can get an hourly based job and get either off campus or on-campus housing. This helps only students who have been able to spend initially about \$8000 (USD). This is difficult for poor, talented students.

Even some banks also sanction loans - again they face some problems.

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Thomas Farrell:

Dear Dr. Mahantappa,

Your comment is vitally important as we look to make the value of study in the U.S. open to the widest possible group of talented individuals. I hope you will appreciate the fact that the Department of State has taken steps to find a solution that will help talented disadvantaged students study here. We have created a new pilot program called "Opportunity Grants" which is operating this year in South and Central America and in Eurasia on an experimental basis. We intend to have the program serve students worldwide if our evaluation of the pilot program is positive. Opportunity Grants provide a significant amount of money to cover cost of application, testing, travel, and other costs to disadvantaged students who then can receive scholarships from U.S. colleges and universities. We know that the government of the U.S. and the government of India through our scholarship programs cannot fully fund every worthy applicant, but we think this new scheme will help us leverage money from other sources.

Shagufa From India:

The most attractive aspect of being a Fulbright Fellow in the U.S. is the open, intellectually stimulating academic climate that the universities offer. Such an ethos enables critical reflection and engagement with pluralistic perspectives that are so essential for academic growth.

I think it is necessary that more U.S. universities engage with cross-cultural perspectives which would enable sensitive understanding of beliefs and behaviors of different people across the world. Relevance of the curriculum to one's own culture would attract more students, especially from the social sciences.

Thomas Farrell:

Dear Shagufa,

What an excellent comment! All of these questions and comments will help me and other members of the delegation make our visit to India very positive and fruitful. It is so good to be able to talk directly to friends who are seriously committed to exchange to help shape our visit. U.S. universities lead the world in providing services for international students and they are committed to cross-cultural understanding and cross-cultural sensitivity. Without this, we cannot achieve mutual understanding or academic success for exchange students. In addition to improving cultural awareness, in the U.S. we have engaged in a major new effort to increase study of foreign languages to demonstrate through study of Indic languages for instance, our deep respect for the cultures and traditions of India and our desire to communicate directly.

Brajesh From India:

Dear Thomas Farrell,

My name is Brajesh and I was a Senior Fulbright to UCLA in 2006. I can say it with pride that it has been one of the most rewarding cultural and academic experiences for a person like me coming from a small university in India. I appreciate Professor Ann Kerr's efforts as a Fulbright Enrichment Officer to make us meet American families, politicians, journalists, and academics through various programs. I worked on Native American Literature and now I share my knowledge with students and colleagues at various campuses in India.

Thomas Farrell:

Dear Brajesh,

It's extremely kind of you to mention Ann Kerr at the UCLA Fulbright Enrichment Office. I've had the pleasure of knowing Ann for a number of years. She is truly dedicated to educational exchanges, and she and her family represent a true U.S. citizen belief in mutual understanding and serving international students who come to study in the United States.

I also appreciated your comment because you discuss both academic and cultural experiences. One of the most important elements of exchanges is the appreciation that this is not just about study. It's about learning about other societies and teaching other citizens about the contributions of the student/scholar's home country.

AMEENA From India:

I participated in the South Asian Collaboration Project organized by NOVA South Eastern University, Florida. Administrators, education officials, master teachers, and teacher trainers were exposed to the innovative U.S. Education Model. We observed excellent resources and a child friendly environment. Deeply impressed by the

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policy of "No Child Left Behind" i.e. education is available to all irrespective of age, class, community. It can only be a dream in our South Asian countries. Education is technology and data driven and all schools have to strive for excellence. The phenomenon which can contribute a lot towards the success of any school - vision and mission for each school with signature statements like - "Soaring is not an option." Four countries (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka) joined the fifth (United States) country for collaboration, participants perceptions about America challenged - greater understanding of the American people and culture, exchange of views on professional challenges and opportunities, better understanding and appreciation of diversities. Professional as well as personal bonds established and visions became aspirations. We insisted that this wonderful collaboration should not come to an end but have some follow up programs also. After coming back my entire attitude towards profession has undergone a transformation. Signature statements like "Failing to plan is planning to fail" have greatly influenced me. I have spread my perception among all. This wonderful collaboration should have some avenues to spread the learning in South Asian countries under the umbrella of the State Department, U.S, and NOVA university. Can we have some suggestions in this direction?

Thomas Farrell:

Dear Ameena,

Thank you for your good words about the program we developed to serve teachers from South Asia. Teachers, I know you've heard me say this to your group, sit at the heart of quality education. When we talk about international education exchange and especially when we meet with India's government leaders, higher education officials, students and faculty, we want to convey the importance of professional development for both Indian teachers and American, in the student and scholar exchange process. Your comments about the transformational experience you enjoyed are exactly the objectives we hope to see all participants benefit from through study in the U.S. I can't tell you how important it is to have you acknowledge the valuable multiplier effect that study and learning abroad can provide.

AMEENA From India:

In continuation...

I was so overwhelmed by my experiences in the U.S. that I have written an essay for the FULBRIGHT PUBLICATION, "SCHOLARS OF INDIA AND US-REFLECTIONS" sharing my reminiscences.

Thanks,
Ameena

Dhanesh From India:

Hello! I am Dhanesh from India and a Humphrey fellow in year 2005-06 at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health. Besides participating in the required activities for the Humphrey program, I could join an Internet based MPH program which I shall be completing from India by 2008. The most attractive part of studying in the U.S. was the intensity and depth of the academic courses and the dedication of most of the course instructors. Another aspect was the exposure to world class teaching technologies, many of which I can practice in India (as a medical teacher). However, what was most exciting (and eye-opening), was the interaction with people from all around world and learning from their cultures and backgrounds.

The education I received in the U.S. allows me to work more intensively, dedicatedly, and successfully for certain goals related to community oriented work in the field of mental health and substance abuse.

Finances are a big impediment for education in the U.S. Though I am grateful for the opportunity provided to me as Humphrey fellow, I am still trying to find the financial assistance for the remaining credits of my MPH course, as I cannot afford from my own resources to pay the huge tuition fees. But, simultaneously I cannot leave the courses in-between (I have already received an 'A' grade in every course I opted and completing MPH is immensely important for my professional carrier).

By providing more support, and of course by monitoring the activities of the supported candidates, so that they will have a sense of public responsibility.

Thomas Farrell:

Hello Dhanesh! It's wonderful to hear from a Humphrey Fellow who is so diligent about taking on additional study

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opportunities. I wish you the best with your MPH plans.

You identify really important strengths of U.S. higher education. They are elements that I believe add immeasurable value to study here. I think one of the most unique attributes about the U.S. higher educational environment is the cross fertilization that occurs when we bring together so many talented people from around the world working for a common purpose in virtually every area of human endeavor. When we think of the contributions those international students make to their fields when studying here, you have identified the benefits you as an Indian Humphrey Fellow derived from the global community on your campus.

Sudarsan:

Most Humphrey fellows in my university faced problems in finding professional affiliations. But each managed to do so finally and it was one of the best parts of our fellowship. We made friends in the organizations we worked in. Could we use the personal connections that we built in those organizations to help make it easier for future Humphrey fellows to get affiliations? Could such a network or database be built? Since most fellows coming to Maryland University are journalists or media persons, such a network could help all fellows coming on the program in the future too.

Thomas Farrell:

Dear Sudarsan,

What an excellent idea! I will talk today with my colleagues in the Humphrey office here at the State Department and make sure that they work with IIE to develop your concept--that's what our network should be all about: making communication and cooperation easier and thinking of lifelong participation both in the learning process and the mutual assistance process.

Sudarsan:

(Hi. This is Sudarsan. Currently, a group of four alumni have gathered at the USEFI Office for the online discussion...)

From Saleem:

Before posing a question let me introduce myself. My name is Saleem. I teach in New Delhi. I have had the pleasure of visiting the U.S. twice as a Fulbrighter. First, in 2001-02 as a scholar in residence for one year and then in 2004 as a visiting specialist for six weeks. I must say this program altered my life incredibly both at the personal and professional level. I strongly feel that SUCH A PROGRAM HAS INCREASING RELEVANCE AND SIGNIFICANCE IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD.

NOW I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW: How to be of any help to make this program better known to young people because I feel that this program has not received the level of publicity it needs in order to attract young talents it deserves.

Thomas Farrell:

Dear Saleem,

How are things on Hailey Road? It's so nice to know that some of you have gathered at the Fulbright House to participate. I truly look forward to being in New Delhi in a few weeks. I know the delegation will have a superb reception and productive visit.

One of the key aims of the delegation is to raise the profile of exchanges in the minds of the public in India and in the U.S. and to highlight programs such as Fulbright, Humphrey, scholarships from the American Institute of Indian Studies, and other exchange opportunities. Around the world we are providing opportunities to engage younger students at earlier phases in their development to interest them in international studies, both American students and young people overseas. I believe that the Fulbright program in India will start to work more closely with the secondary school population, teachers, and younger university students, to inform them about the opportunities of international study, especially study in the U.S, and this is a key area of discussion for our visit.

Brajesh From India:

Dear Thomas Farrell:

I would like to ask a question relating to your proposed visit to India. Are you confining your visit to big cities and central universities, or do you plan to discuss exchanges with small campuses like Kurukshetra University where I

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work as a reader. Is there a possibility of our Vice Chancellor meeting you at Delhi?

Thomas Farrell:

Dear Brajesh,

It's nice to actually be having a dialogue. Thank you for your follow-up question. We are extremely pleased that the delegation will be able to meet with senior government and university leaders in our short time in India. We will be visiting two large metropolitan areas, but in both locations, we will be meeting with a wide range of higher education leaders representing various sectors of the higher education community and I am hopeful that they will be representing various regions in India. Our delegation will consist of higher education leaders, presidents of colleges and universities from various places in the U.S, who represent more than 4,000 higher education institutions in the U.S. and the richness and diversity of educational opportunities. Therefore, we want to see a similarly diverse group in India.

Ovais From India:

Hi Mr. Farrell,

My name is Ali. ASI (batch 2004), an exchange program that I was a part of, has been an advantage in my life. I feel proud to be an alumnus of the U.S. students' leadership program. Wherever I go for work, people do ask me about my experience and reason for my visit. And every time I feel a day is not enough to describe how beautiful the entire summer was.

Mr. Farrell, I applied for one of the U.S. programs (PLUS), but my application was rejected. I fail to understand why that happened. Is it something to do with me already being a part of U.S. alumni or being biased on any other grounds? Because as far as my application goes, it had all the ingredients necessary, along with the experience of being a part of U.S. Alumni.

(I hope you remember me Mr. Farrell, we met at one of the restaurants on our final day dinner!!)

Thomas Farrell:

Hi Ali! Of course I remember you. As I recall, I left a very exuberant group of students after the dinner so that I could go home to bed while you planned to stay up all night continuing to build mutual understanding! :)

Ali, I am happy that you wanted to participate in a follow-on program. I'm glad to see that your summer institute program had that impact. Please continue to look at summer opportunities. Only last year we began providing additional opportunities for semester and year long undergraduate study in the U.S. If all things go well, you may have another chance. --Ali, are you still an undergraduate? If not, I encourage you to apply for a Fulbright Fellowship and contact the Fulbright office in New Delhi for more information.

Sudarsan:

From Rema:

Has the fellowship made a difference to my career? Oh YES! Today I am a woman journalist who does number crunching, and data analysis, something totally not associated with women. Women are not supposed to be good at numbers. Well here I am proving them wrong, thanks to my training in the U.S. My stint in the U.S. ensured a new job, a promotion, hike in salary and an enhanced job profile. The U.S. has also taught me to be assertive, to say NO when I wanted to and also that if you want something ASK FOR IT, because no one can help you otherwise.

Thomas Farrell:

Rema,

Great to read your comment. Too bad we didn't have this web chat yesterday on International Women's Day because your comments surely inspire women (and men) everywhere. I'm going to make your comment about the value of a U.S. education a lead off line during the orientation of the delegation. Thank you.

Dhanesh From India :

In continuation - There are many selling points about India:

India provides one of the best living examples of plurality of cultures, languages, religions, ethnic groups - living relatively peacefully exhibiting examples of tolerance, mutual respect, and cooperation. This is what the world

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requires today and will require more in the future. Anybody who wants to contribute for a better world may learn many things by studying the people of India - their history, culture, life etc.

Second selling point would be to study how India is tackling (and will be tackling) its enormous problems of diverse nature.

Thirdly, India and the U.S. have many similarities - in problems, resources, strengths, vision, and world perception. The U.S. student will definitely be enriched by their experiences and observations while studying in India.

Thomas Farrell :

Hello again Dhanesh, I'm loving this web chat! It's so good to be able to connect across time zones and get into the spirit of our upcoming delegation.

Dhanesh, you and your fellow alumni of Study in the U.S. have an important responsibility. I think everyone recognizes that you are the best representatives about the value of U.S. higher education, but I would respectfully ask that you consider us to help market the "India" experience and the value of studying in India for Americans. The U.S. and the Republic of India enjoy one of the most important bilateral, bi-national relationships in the world. I'm happy to see that the number of Americans studying in India is growing at a very healthy rate. But we need many more American students there. I don't think it is unrealistic to suggest that we target the 10,000 number by 2010! But we will need to work together to develop programs American students can "plug in to," and I believe that we need to work very closely with the higher education sector in India on the development of international student support services. From my perspective, it seems those countries that take international student services seriously are having the most success in attracting more international students, including Americans. Also, we will be helped by the U.S. State Department's strong support for language learning and intensive language study in India. We are serious about building a much larger group of Americans who understand India as deeply as Indian students understand the United States.

Sudarsan :

The biggest impediment to studying in the U.S. - CHOICE.

Such a plethora of courses, all of which seem exciting and useful. Deciding which one would be the right one, the most useful or relevant, was the most difficult part. But our coordinator Kalyani, who is no longer with the program, was absolutely fantastic in steering us away from courses for which she had gotten bad feedback from earlier fellows, telling us what other fellows had found really useful and so on. We could not have done it without her.

Ajitava From India :

I have found my experience of studying for the doctorate in the U.S. extremely rewarding. It not only widens the life vision but brings out the suppressed talents in the individual. Later, my Fulbright experience only strengthened my views. Lately, however, some of my bright students are leaving for countries like UK and Australia right after graduation since they could get admission there but not in the U.S. because of 16 years of schooling requirements. Since I have taught the undergraduates both in the U.S. and India, students in good colleges here learn almost the same in their major subjects as the U.S. counterparts in their three year postsecondary bachelor's education. I find this requirement rather more mechanical rather than productive. Also, U.S. universities should participate more in educational fairs in important cities in India, as this would be mutually beneficial to the bright Indian students and the best universities in the U.S.

Lately, I am involved in promoting cooperation between a 23 member strong Virginia Community College System and my university, Jadavpur University. The idea is to find new ways to invigorate the rather weak and dormant vocational education in India. Unfortunately, we find not much active support from U.S. agencies, like USAID. One has to realize that the vocational postsecondary education is the only way out to address the crisis of employment in countries like India in this age of globalization. I would like to see more support from U.S. agencies in such efforts so that one can learn and adopt from the highly successful community college system in the U.S.

Thomas Farrell :

Dear Ajitava,

Under Secretary Karen Hughes, who is leading the delegation along with the U.S. college and university presidents, is perhaps the strongest advocate for community college development that we have ever known in the

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Department of State and the U.S. international exchange field. She is committed to this area and we've begun in the last year a pilot Community College Initiative in six countries in all world regions. If the pilot initiative goes well, and I'm sure it will, we want to expand it in the future. Thank you for your comments.

Dhanesh From India :

Dear Mr. Farrell,

I definitely realize the responsibility for fostering the interest among American students for studying in India on one hand, and for creating the support services for international students in India. I will gladly do whatever I could think by myself, or assigned task.

Thomas Farrell :

Well friends, it's time for me to prepare to go to Capitol Hill to talk to staff in Congress about the importance of our exchange programs, so I must bid you farewell. I hope I've conveyed through this medium how pleased I am to have been able to enter into a dialogue with you and to have you help us shape the delegation's visit and consultations with your nation's leaders in various sectors of Indian society. The delegation's visit has three aims: 1) to promote study in and the value of U.S. higher education, 2) to promote interest in study in India by American students and scholars, and to work to increase those numbers, and 3) to develop collaboration across borders between our two nations' extraordinarily rich higher education sectors.

Bye for now, I'm hopeful that our paths will cross during the delegation visit or at some time in the future.

Best regards.

Sudarsan :

Thanks Mr Farrel. The program was a GREAT experience. Looking forward to meeting you when you visit India.
Rema, Humphrey Fellow

Dhanesh From India :

Thank you very much for this web chat. I really enjoyed it and felt reinforced for some of the things that I am doing/plan to do.

Brajesh From India :

Thanks Thomas and the State Alumni team for making it a meaningful and interesting experience.

Brajesh, Rashmi, and Arpita

Moderator:

Many thanks to everyone who participated in this lively discussion! Thank you to Mr. Tom Farrell who took time out of his busy schedule to answer so many questions.